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A meter reader with the Kakamega County Water and Sanitation Company checks a consumer's water point. KIWASH supported the water utility to streamline this process by making sure supporting photos are collected, which eliminates the opportunity to tamper with readings. Photo credit: Euphresia Luseka/KIWASH.

Kenyan County Sets Sights on Lofty WASH Goals

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The government in Kakamega County — Kenya's second-most populated county (after the capital, Nairobi), with nearly 2 million residents — has set a goal to supply piped water to 80 percent of its residents by 2022. While 61 percent of residents currently have access to improved water sources, the county in Kenya's far west is largely rural, so connecting more customers to the water utility is no small task.

“With the capacity development and infrastructure support we have received from Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (KIWASH) project, we are ready for take off,” explains the county's Chief Officer for Water Joseck Maloba.

KIWASH is a five-year USAID program with the goal of improving the lives and health of Kenyan citizens in nine counties through the development and management of sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. It was developed to

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take on nearly all aspects of WASH from water catchment protection, to policy and legislation development, and services provision management.

“KIWASH was meant to try to holistically and comprehensively address the WASH needs in specific counties in Kenya,” says Amanda Robertson, Senior WASH Advisor with USAID/Kenya and East Africa. “Through KIWASH, we’ve really been able to be ambitious and to say ‘here is a wide set of problems and we’re going to try to tackle those in an exhaustive way.’”

To make the government more accountable for service delivery to citizens, Kenya devolved many of its governance functions from national to county level as enshrined in the country’s 2010 Constitution. As a result, the counties are now responsible for providing water and sanitation services, rather than the central government. Thus much of KIWASH’s work is with county governments. “We have staff from KIWASH that are embedded at the county level, so that means they are able to do their planning together,” explains Nicholas Owuor, USAID/Kenya and East Africa Program Management Specialist for WASH.

As a KIWASH WASH Governance Specialist, Euphresia Luseka is that point of contact in Kakamega County. “I sit in the office where the Minister of Water, the Chief Officer of Water, and the Directors of Water sit,” she says. “In terms of activity design, implementation, monitoring, participating in each other activities, mentoring and coaching, and being available all the time, it really helps in creating ownership and accountability of processes.”

KIWASH’s emphasis on a close relationship with local government means that gains made through the program are likely to be sustainable. “It’s truly viewed as USAID having a partnership with the county government, and that local ownership is really what allows all the work to happen,” explains Robertson. “It’s very much owned by them.”

In Kakamega County, KIWASH has helped the local government develop policies that will guide their water services priorities, and the county has increased the budget allocation for WASH services and related capital investments by more than 100 percent as a result.

“KIWASH has really helped us improve water services through projects that are aligned to the government’s agenda. We now plan to create a rural water company to operate community water utilities for uniformity of service and sustainability of the water services in [all] the rural towns and villages,” says John Baraza, Kakamega County Minister for Water, Environment, and Natural Resources.

The program has also focused on strengthening corporate governance and operational efficiency at Kakamega County Urban Water and Sewerage Company (KACWASCO). As a result, the utility adopted automated metering and billing processes and data management, developed company policies, overhauled customer services, and introduced staff performance agreements. This led to improved overall performance and expanded water coverage for 87 percent of residents in the area (up from 68 percent before 2016). Annual revenues increased by 36 percent, from US\$19.2 million to \$30 million. KACWASCO is now one of the top-ten performing

water utilities in Kenya, and its credit rating has increased from a B to a BB.

KACWASCO's customers have noticed the improvements. A customer survey conducted in December 2019 indicated an 81 percent approval rating, up from 65 percent in 2017. "Customers are now willing to pay for water," says Luseka. "They are now feeling like KACWASCO is more reliable and they can depend on their services." Water quality is also critically important for consumers, and Luseka says that reported rates of waterborne disease have been cut in half.

KIWASH also emphasizes partnerships with the private sector to try to expand WASH coverage. "We have a huge potential in terms of resources in the private sector that we'll be able to tap," says Owuor. "We have raised close to \$25 million from various commercial banks going into water companies." Additional investments in WASH in Kakamega have come from KIWASH recoverable grants and growth in revenue from the 24 small enterprises working with the project.

Luseka feels that the future is bright for Kakamega County's water services. "Even if another management team comes in place or another county government leadership comes in place, they will find this precedence, so it will be so tough for them to fall back. They will now be aiming higher and higher."

By Christine Chumbler



Additional Resources:

- [USAID Kenya](#)
- [Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene](#)
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